

Spanish-American War

The Spanish-American War (1898) marked the emergence of the United States as a great power and the advent of American overseas imperialism.

During the 19th century, American exponents of MANIFEST DESTINY likened Cuba, a Spanish colony, to a ripening fruit destined ultimately to fall into outstretched American hands. The expansionists' hunger intensified after 1895, when Cuban nationalists began a bloody insurrection against the Spanish colonial government. Spain's ruthless Gen. Valeriano Weyler herded Cuban farmers into squalid concentration camps. Many men, women, and children died, and Weyler was dubbed "butcher" by William Randolph Hearst's sensationalist New York Journal. This and other "yellow" journals (see YELLOW JOURNALISM) fanned American public opinion and editorialized for humanitarian intervention and the annexation of Cuba by the United States. On Feb. 9, 1898, Hearst published a purloined private letter in which the Spanish minister to the United States sharply criticized President William MCKINLEY; on February 15, the American battleship MAINE exploded in Havana harbor. McKinley had resisted the surging pressure for intervention as long as resistance was politically expedient, but the drift toward war soon became inexorable despite accelerated Spanish attempts to withdraw from Cuba without losing face. On April 11, McKinley in effect requested a declaration of war, which Congress passed on April 25.

The Fighting

Combat lasted only 10 weeks, but it proved one-sided and decisive. In the Pacific, Commodore George DEWEY steamed swiftly from Hong Kong aboard his flagship Olympia, one of the modern steel cruisers of the "new navy" fashioned in the 1880s and '90s. Dewey's squadron slipped into Manila harbor and on May 1 destroyed the obsolete Spanish fleet lying at anchor. Reinforced by the army in June, Dewey besieged the Spanish garrison in Manila, capturing the city on August 13. In July—to support these combined operations—the U.S. Navy had seized Spanish Guam and previously unclaimed Wake Island, and Congress by joint resolution had annexed Hawaii.

In the Caribbean, Spanish ships under Adm. Pasqual Cervera sailed safely into the harbor of Santiago de Cuba. By the end of May, however, they were blockaded there by U.S. naval forces. U.S. troops under Gen. William R. SHAFTER landed in Cuba in late June and pressed toward Santiago. These ground forces included the regular army as well as special volunteer regiments, the most famous of which were the ROUGH RIDERS, led by Theodore ROOSEVELT and Leonard WOOD. The Americans were victorious at the battles of El Caney and San Juan Hill on July 1. Determined to maintain Spain's honor, Cervera made a dash for the open sea on July 3, although the imbalance between his outdated Spanish vessels and the modern American ships off Cuba was almost as great as the disparity between the fleets in the Philippines. The guns of the new battleships and cruisers commanded by Rear Admiral William T. SAMPSON and Commodore Winfield Scott SCHLEY sank most of the Spanish ships in less than 4 hours. Spain suffered 474 casualties to only two for the United States. On July 17, Santiago and Cuba's 24,000 Spanish troops surrendered. Madrid sued for peace 9 days later.

The Treaty of Paris

During the peace negotiations the United States did not seek annexation of Cuba because the Teller Amendment to the declaration of war forbade American acquisition of the island. However, McKinley demanded Spanish cession of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippine Islands. In the Treaty of Paris, concluded on December 10, a humiliated Spain yielded to American imperialism.

The imperialistic grab was not universally popular in the United States, and the Senate fight over the treaty was intense. Among those opposed to annexation of the Philippines were Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, several senior Republican senators, and many Democrats. They argued that acquisition of noncontiguous areas populated by peoples allegedly unsuited for assimilation into American society was contrary to the principles of American democracy. The imperialists stressed the role of the United States as an agent of civilization and the importance of possessing a threshold to the trade with China, on which the Americans and British were attempting to impose the so-called Open Door Policy. The imperialists carried the day, in large measure because William Jennings BRYAN, an avowed antiimperialist and the probable Democratic candidate for president in 1900, urged Democratic senators to vote for the Treaty of Paris in order to terminate the state of war. By the narrow margin of 57 to 27 (only two votes more than the number needed for ratification) the Senate approved the pact on Feb. 6, 1899. Bryan, who intended to relinquish the Philippines if elected president, lost the election of 1900 to McKinley, and the United States retained the islands.

The "splendid little war" established the United States as a major power in the Far East and the dominant power in

the Caribbean. Although Filipino nationalists fought a bitter four-year struggle for immediate independence, the United States clung to the archipelago because it seemed a portal to the China market. Puerto Rico became an American colony and the site of an American naval base, and nominally independent Cuba ceded territory for naval stations to the United States under the terms of a constitution—with the so-called PLATT AMENDMENT appended to it—imposed by the American Congress and Secretary of War Elihu ROOT. These two islands were strategically significant to the defense of the Panama Canal, which was begun in 1904.

Kenneth J. Hagan

Bibliography: Chadwick, French E., *The Relations of the United States and Spain: The Spanish-American War*, 2 vols. (1911; repr. 1968); Foner, Philip S., *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895-1902*, 2 vols. (1972); Freidel, Frank, *The Splendid Little War* (1958); Gould, Lewis L., *The Spanish-American War and President McKinley* (1982); Offner, John L., *An Unwanted War* (1992); O'Toole, G. J., *The Spanish War* (1986); Pratt, Julius W., *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands* (1936; repr. 1959); Trask, David E., *The War with Spain in Eighteen and Ninety-Eight* (1981).